

Assignment One: Personal Literacy Narrative

DUE in class M, 1/28/08

Context:

For this first major essay, we'd like you to explore some of the important moments in your own encounters with language. First, consider the following testimony of Mike Rose:

Desire gets confused on South Vermont. There were times when I wanted so much to be other than what I was, to walk through the magical gate of a television cottage. But strange blessing, we can never really free ourselves from the mood of early neighborhoods, from our first stories, from the original tales of hope and despair. There are basic truths about the vulnerability and power of coming to know, about the way the world invites and denies language. This is what lies at the base of education--to be tapped or sealed over or distorted, by others, by us. Lives on the Boundary 240

Readings:

- Mike Rose, "I Just Wanna Be Average" and Richard Rodriguez, "Aria"

The Assignment:

Write a 3- to 5-page literacy narrative that re-tells or analyzes one important scene, incident, experience, or character in your development as a reader, writer, or thinker. Try to devote equal time to both dramatizing the memory and pondering its significance. Use all the techniques of an essayist--image, scene, person, description--to both teach and delight your readers. Remember, too, that this is not simply an exercise in "navel gazing." Rather, we'd like you to reflect critically on what literacy means to you and how you see this operating in American (or college) culture.

Questions to get you thinking:

- 1) What are your earliest memories associated with learning to read?
- (2) What are your earliest memories associated with learning to write?
- (3) How do you currently approach reading/writing tasks?
- (4) How do you feel about yourself as a reader?
- (5) How do you feel about yourself as a writer?
- (6) How do you use language in different settings?

A well-rounded narrative will more than likely make some reference to what happened, who was involved, when and where it happened, how it happened, and why it happened. Readers will want to know what you learned, why it's important to understand your story, and how your experience might help to shed some light on their own. Your audience for this essay will be a familiar one (your peers, your instructors), so, the style may be somewhat informal or familiar, with an eye for cultivating the good will of the reader.

For this particular assignment, we will really focus on ethos (the appeal to the credibility of the speaker or writer) and pathos (the appeal to emotion) and interesting introductions that employ both; so, I'd like you to consider the importance of presenting yourselves as someone your reader can identify with and to consider how you can use language to get your readers emotionally involved as they read your narrative. Think about what feelings and experiences your readers will recognize as familiar ones and how you can use these experiences to foster trust/credibility, teach, or entertain. You should also consider how you can blend ethical and pathetic appeals within your introduction, in order to draw your readers into your narrative.